

Picture

the Story

Collage Creation for Writers



Welcome to an exciting opportunity to combine your passion for writing with fun experiments in visual art! During this three-part class, we will discuss the process of studying images with writing in mind, using novels and photography for the process. From there, we will practice combining pieces of art to create collages for fun, as well as publication.

The work of W. G. Sebald, Susan Sontag, John Berger, and Geoff Dyer will give us our point of departure.

Let's begin our exciting exploration of words and images!



A Summer Writing Class

August 16, 23 & 30, 2022 (6PM to 7:30)

BFree Gallery, 7857 Girard Ave, La Jolla, CA

Create Blogs!

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Journal Entries!

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Family Histories!

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Memoirs!

***How do you begin
your writing process?***

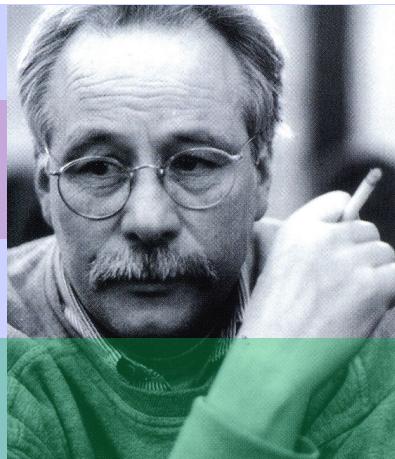
***Creating digital collages
is a wonderful start!***

Tools for Inspiration:

- 1) Basic Pieces of Free Clipart
- 2) Microsoft Publisher
- 3) A Story to Share with the World

W. G. Sebald

"Riffing on Images"



Critics have often praised Sebald's innovative use of photos. Placing them rather mysteriously in his novels, the author "riffs" on the images with his exquisite prose. On page 58 of *The Rings of Saturn*, we find a puzzling, unidentified picture which adds intrigue to the narrative. Comprised of soft edges and a curious landscape, the image was likely achieved with the aid of a photocopier, one of Sebald's favorite techniques. We can learn as much from these mysterious photos as we can from his richly visual prose.

Delving a Bit Deeper . . .

Images do indeed convey voluminous amounts of information, often complementing or even challenging the written word. In *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald refined his use of photos to complement his style, which was, at once, historical, autobiographical, and fictional. Consider the lighthouse depicted on page 75, which is very clear and direct in contrast to the previous image we examined.

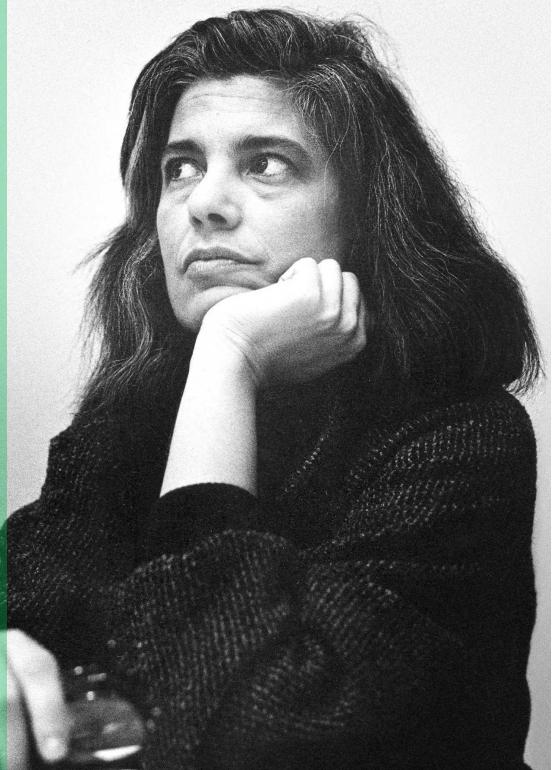
Notice the way in which it complements the richness of his prose. Here, we learn how to weave an image so tightly into the text that it leaves us with more questions than answers, heightening the sense of mystery rather than quelling it.

On page 103, Sebald uses this technique with an archival portrait, achieving stunning results. Again, we find that he employs visual narratives to sustain uncertainty.

With Sontag, we switch gears a bit. Regarding the photograph as an expression of culture and human behavior, she comments on the advent of instant cameras, bemoaning how the dubious technology defined 1970s tourism. Going further, however, Sontag delves into the deeper issues at hand, reminding us that a photo stands as *evidence*; it proves that we were in a certain place at a certain time, while, simultaneously, capturing the moment before it falls to the influences of decay. In short, "the twilight art" pertains to memory.

As you create your own collages, consider Sebaldian photos, how they deepen the intrigue of an already intricate piece of writing. Then, remember that your images can also serve as elegiac expressions of culture.

*... casting
a grey shadow
upon the earth.*



Susan Sontag

"Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos. An ugly or grotesque subject may be moving because it has been dignified by the attention of the photographer. A beautiful subject can be the object of rueful feelings, because it has aged or decayed or no longer exists" (p.15).



... that which *was* and *is*

John Berger



Whereas Sebald used photographs for his novels, and Sontag studied their cultural and psychological contexts, Berger's analysis was more directly interpretive. He would delve into a picture and read it, dissecting each element with care. In this way, he helps us to fathom the intangible qualities of an image, clarifying why certain photos make us feel such overwhelming and often contrary emotions. Berger was indeed concerned with helping us to understand "... that which *was* and *is*."

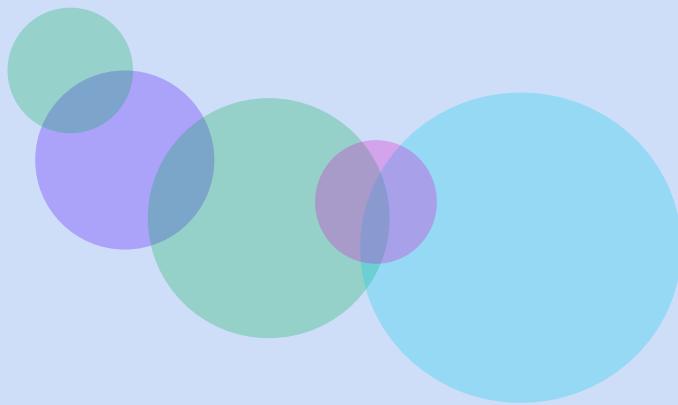
"A mother with her child is staring intently at a soldier. Perhaps they are speaking. We cannot hear their words. Perhaps they are saying nothing and everything is being said by the way they are looking at each other. Certainly a drama is being enacted between them" (p. 64).

As collage artists, we learn to appreciate the power of a solitary image before applying it to a composition. Berger reminds us to read the image as a drama, a piece of history unfolding before our eyes.

Understanding a Photograph

The inherent limitations of photography make it rather poetic, in my estimation, a condition Berger recognized well. In *Understanding a Photograph*, he points out that, unlike a painter who can control and manipulate the images she represents, a photographer can only choose the moment he isolates. Thus, the photo is powerful because of what it does not include. Perhaps this applies to the photo of Berger himself, included here. He appears to be deep in thought with his shot glass close at hand. Is he glancing in the direction of a friend? Is he regarding his own work with a look of distant reflection? We are left with the mystery of this isolated image. This sense of pathos is something we can try to capture as we create our collages from various pieces of old photos.

Geoff Dyer



See/Saw

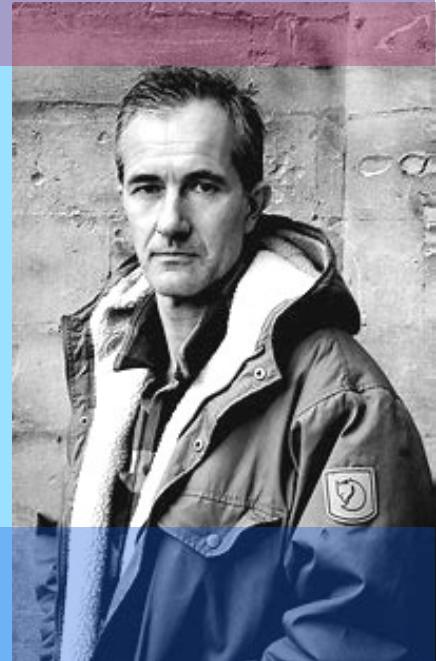
Looking at Photographs

Photographers capture the past in evidentiary fashion, preserving it for historians to examine. In short, those intrepid souls, armed with their cameras, give us a wide array of facts to collect and consider. Although subject names and exact dates may be forgotten, the *fact* that someone stood in a doorway during the previous century—or stormed a beach while clutching a rifle—is difficult to dispute if a photo is produced. In his essay on Alvin Langdon Coburn, Dyer analyzes this form of influence—the power of historical image creation.

The water retains some slowed suggestion of motion . . .

One of the images he examines is “London Bridge,” a 1904 photograph that truly resonates with a beautiful, albeit “mushy” quality, an effect deftly described by Dyer. The imagery of the flowing crowd—as well as the implied motion of the water below—hints at the torrents of history yet to come. We can definitely feel the pathos articulated by Sontag and Berger in their work, as we study this old photograph. It contains a fragile image, a moment of time graced by soft edges of stone and the darkly-clad members of a crowd, people long gone and forgotten. There is something so moving about this isolated frame of life that one hardly knows how to attempt formal analysis. Seeing “London Bridge” here, in class, what are your impressions? Does it inspire you to create?

As students of collage, we must remain aware of the heritage of photography and find new ways to incorporate its curious impact into our compositions.



As an editor of John Berger’s work, and an insightful critic in his own right, Dyer teaches us how to *look* at photographs, considering the images carefully and regarding their contexts. And, like Berger, he often builds his observations around biographical profiles, allowing photographers to contextualize their own work. What can we learn if we approach Dyer’s commentaries with collage creation in mind?

Photographer as Artist

Dyer reminds us to see the photographer as an artist, as well as one who documents the visual remembrances of history. For posterity’s sake, each subject is situated within the camera frame and captured, protected from age and decay. As collage artists, we borrow this vision as we cut fragments from magazines and old photos, or collect pieces of clipart. If we learn our craft well, we can create semi-historical dreamscapes, augmenting the work of numerous photographers. Sebald, Sontag, Berger, and Dyer have truly given us much to reflect upon as we begin our task.

With this in mind, consider how you will combine magazine photos when we create collages during the next session.



Doorway Perspectives 1

Visual Prompts for Writers

Visual arrangements are useful for writers. They enable us to examine methods of composition, and, quite importantly, help us to think about narrative development in terms of what we see before us. From paintings and sculptures to film and photography, visual subjects enhance our sense of language by informing it with color, texture, and transformations of light.

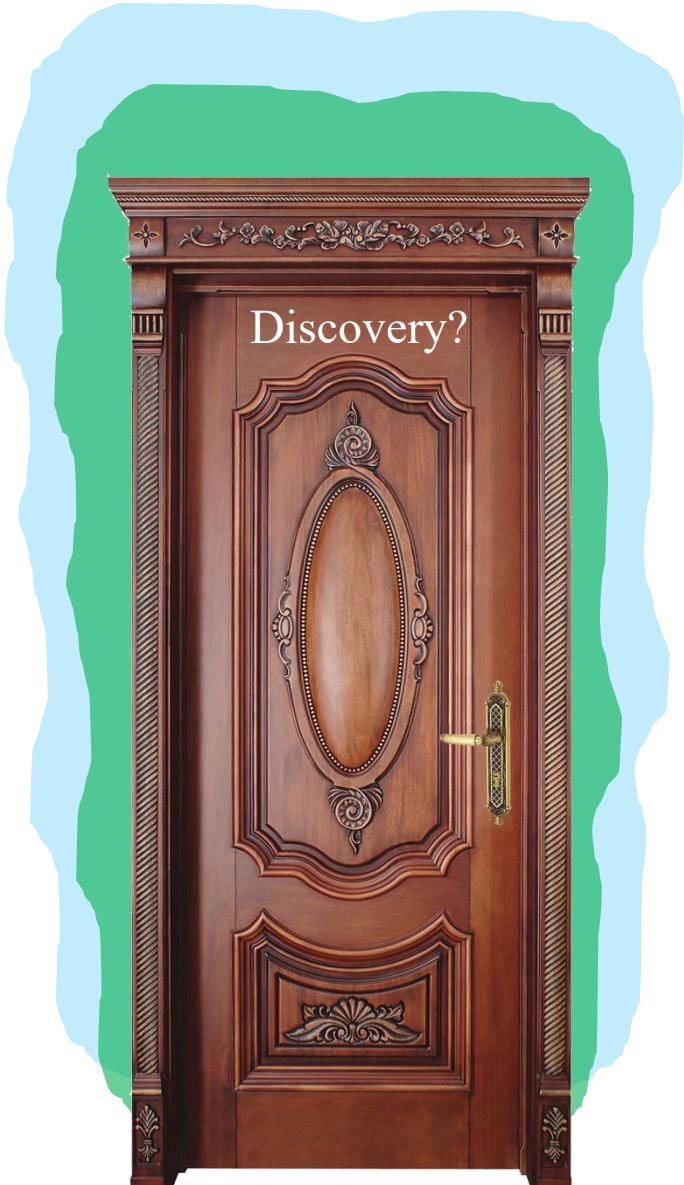
Several years ago, with the goal of creating visual prompts for my writing, I broke open the piggy bank and purchased a DSLR camera, planning to photograph everything I could find, from plants and architecture to vacant lots and rusted cars in rough sections of town. As you can imagine, from the very first moments of my journey, I began to learn by trial and error.

Street photography serves to open our eyes and enhance our level of awareness, one edgy situation at a time.

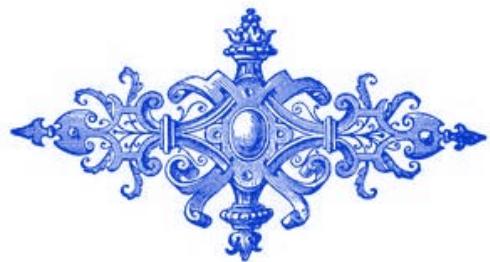
It sounds exciting — and it is — shooting pictures up and down the city block, dodging traffic, hoping not to anger your subjects. And herein lies the tricky aspect of this practice; I learned very quickly that taking pictures of strangers on street corners is — aside from being socially awkward in the extreme — an excellent way to get punched and robbed. Apart from that, it just feels a bit cringy and invasive. Having learned that particular lesson, I gradually began to photograph architecture, exploring window reflections and rooftop shadows as they transform, changing under the influences of the sun. Approaching photography as a writer, trying to understand visual experiences in terms of language, gave me some interesting insights and offered difficult moments of frustration, as well.

Writing Prompts:

- 1) Imagine that you have discovered the doorway in the previous collage. You are a private investigator who has been tasked with recovering a kidnap victim. In a brief paragraph, tell us the story of what you discover as you enter.
- 2) You are a creative writing student, and you have been given a very specific assignment. You must begin the story of your life with the image of a doorway. Give us your narrative in a brief paragraph.

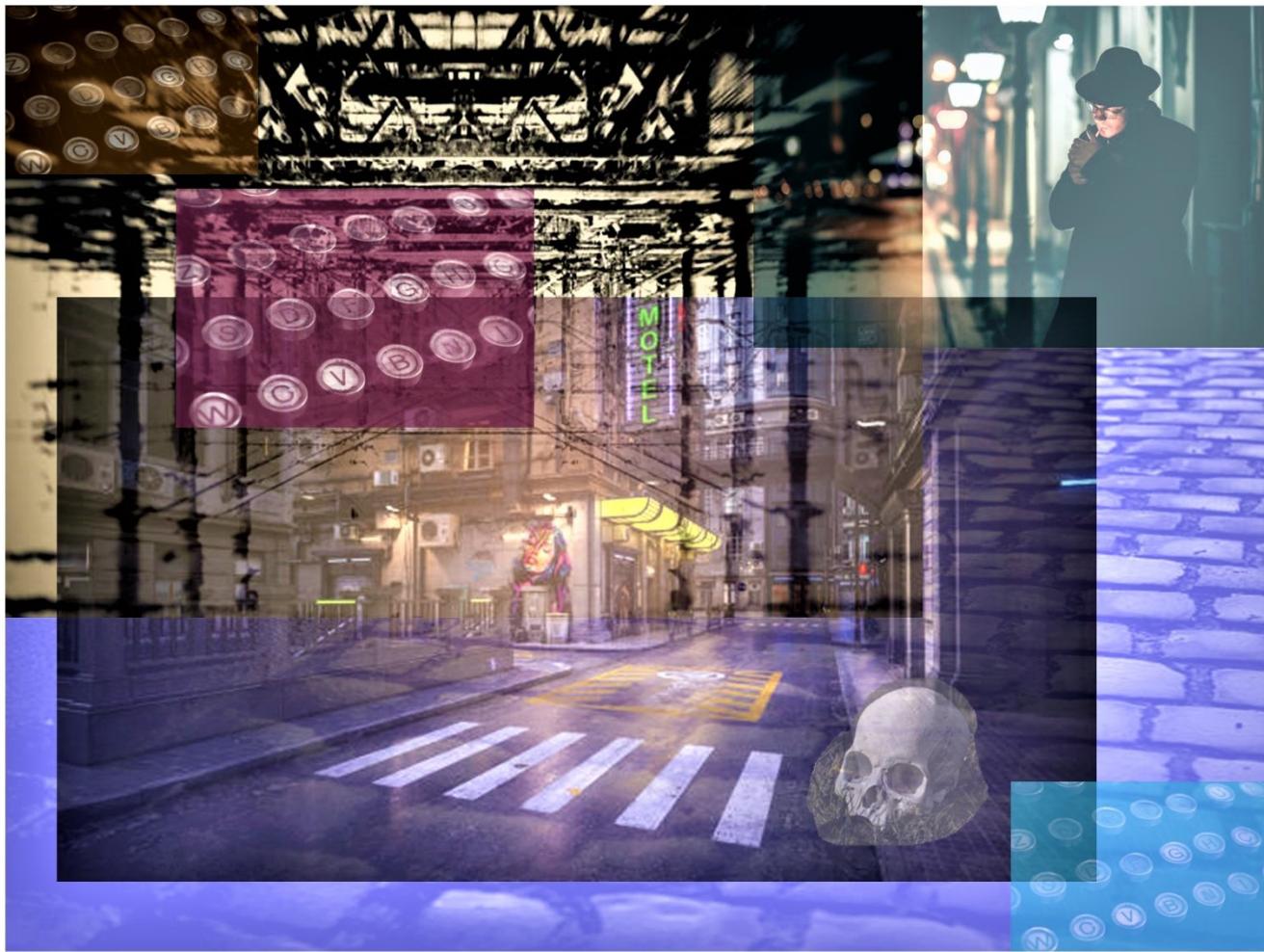


Clipart :



Techniques and Tips!





Collage by A. M. Palmer

To achieve a sense of depth and texture, we use various levels of transparency, in addition to assigning new colors to certain images. We can thereby accentuate the light in the center photo and, at the same time, emphasize the storytelling theme by incorporating serial imagery; notice that the keyboard appears three times.



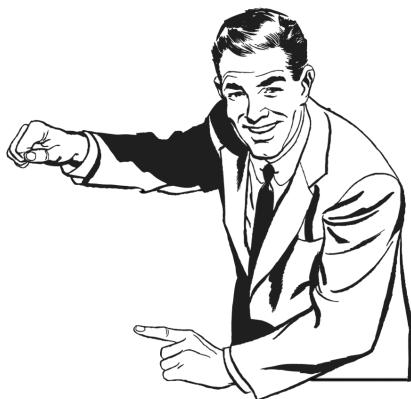
Here, we have the various stock photos utilized on the previous page. They are all available on Pixabay and iStock.





Collage by A. M. Palmer

In this example, transparent blocks of color have been placed to lend cohesion and offer a sense of excitement to our composition. Also, notice that the main element, a stock cartoon image, is far more impactful when converted to a bright shade of blue. As you can see, layering a number of colorful elements creates a strong visual narrative.



NEWS - LETTER



Newsletter

Newsletter

PHILADELPHIA,
JANUARY 10, 1800.—The Committee of the West African and Wesleyan Society of Friends and Accepted Masons, who were engaged in the Anti-Slavery cause, and who have been instrumental in three hundred of the Bethel Societies, and in the Anti-Slavery cause, and who have given one thousand dollars to the Anti-Slavery cause, and who have given one thousand dollars to the Friend Friends from China to assist themselves, the President of Friends are as follows,

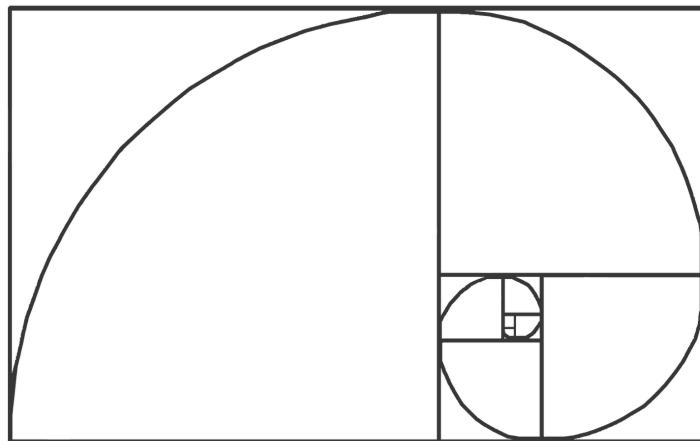
1. Two Leagues, with blue wind wpt gold.
2. The Quebec Order, Blue and Cravat, with blue wind wpt gold.
3. The Royal Wool and Cord, with three color silken rope, borne by the Grand Master, Blue and Yellow.
4. A Reverend Master,
Five Diamond, green wind.
The Wool and Cord George Washington, Master, Accepted Mason, Blue and Yellow.
6. The two Great Wards, blue and yellow paper plum.
7. The Wool and Cord of the Left Logion,
The perfect Master Logion,
The Senior Wards, blue and yellow paper plum,
The Secretary, blue and yellow Logion,
The Trustees,
The Wool and Cord of the Right Logion,
Visiting Wards,
The Wool and Cord of the Left Logion, waking two and one, successively, to the Master.

TO BE SOLD BY
JOHN MCCALLA, JUN.
In this State.
A VELL. object of Gold and Silver
Lace for旣紗, Gold and Silver Lace Gar-
ments, and the very best kind of Gold and Silver Cash.
1565 Acres of LAND.
TO BE SOLD, the above tract, containing
fifty six miles, lies in the county of Tryon and
part of New York, within two, three and four miles
of the navigable water of the Mohawk river, and twelve
miles from the village of Utica. It is in four townships
and contains 1565 acres, and is in every part
well broken up and very access to a market. For terms
apply to WILLIAM COX, near Herkimer, or to
TENCH COOPER.

be SOLD by Public Vendue,
on the first day of January next, at seven
o'clock in the morning, in the hall of John Cram's
Hotel, in the city of Boston, a
PAIR of good timber-hands, a cap, and
a pair of shears with a hole in a scabbard. No. 10
an order from the Court of Common Pleas being
an attachment in favor of John Cram against
Henry, 23
JAMES CLAYPOOLE, Sheriff.

ROBBERY!
FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD,
OLEN out of the Circuit, for the apprehension of
Montgomery Townsley, a notorious
member of the sixth street, (Duxbury) every person
who apprehends him, will be entitled to the sum
of fifty dollars.

Elements to Consider:



Referencing the **Golden Ratio**—without the mathematics—think about how you might arrange the following elements in a visual composition.



Writing Prompts

1) What a day! You were just informed that you won the racecar on the right side of the page. However, all is not well; just as you receive the keys, a man with an angry glare rapidly approaches. He is heading in your direction! What happens next?

2) Let's think back to the curious photo on page 58 of *The Rings of Saturn* by W. G. Sebald. We see crowds of people who seem to fade into a blur of hillside vegetation. Or, are the hills covered with people rather than trees and bushes? What is going on in this picture? Tell us the story!

3) You are in a fragrant forest, walking cheerfully down a trail. Soon, you notice something in the distance, what appears to be . . . the owl from the previous page. And, as chance would have it, he is standing right next to the lovely pink donut. What is going on here?

4) For this prompt, we will reference the stock photographs on page 9, specifically, the city scene pictured just below the keyboard. Suddenly, you find yourself right there in the picture, standing in the crosswalk! Tell us what happens next!

5) Now, you find yourself speaking to the man in the lower right corner of the same page. As he lights his cigarette, he hands you a package and says something in a hushed tone. What did he just tell you? And what on earth is in that package?

6) And, most curiously of all, we find a skull pictured in the righthand corner of the page. You are an investigator, and you have just discovered it. Tell us the story!



Random Objects:

When you are ready to enjoy a fun exercise, treat yourself to some *random object* prompts.

To the right, you will find them listed in no particular order. Use each one as a point of departure for storytelling.

Have fun and tell some interesting stories!

- 1) A Dog (Standing on Your Porch)
- 2) A Cup of Coffee
- 3) A Stack of Books with a Gold Key on Top
- 4) A Lighthouse on a Dark Hill

Exercise your creativity by telling the most outlandish (or sensible) story you wish. The key is to have fun and free your imagination!

Bibliography:

Berger, John. *Understanding a Photograph* (Edited and Introduced by Geoff Dyer) (New York: Aperture, 1967).

Dyer, Geoff. *See/Saw: Looking at Photographs (Essays 2010 –2020)* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2021).

Sebald, W. G. *The Rings of Saturn* (London: The Harvill Press, 1998).

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973).

For Further Reading:

Experience: Culture, Cognition and the Common Sense (Caroline Jones, David Mather & Rebecca Uchill, Editors) (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016).

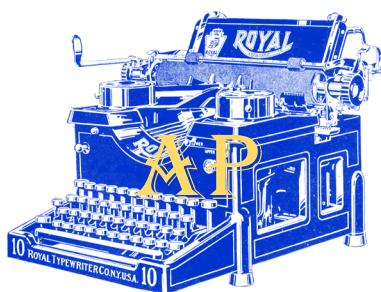
Gardner, John. *On Writers & Writing* (New York: MFJ Books, 1994).

Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction (Tracy Kidder & Richard Todd) (New York: Random House, 2013).

LaPlante, Alice. *The Making of a Story: A Norton Guide to Creative Writing* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

Salle, David. *How to See: Looking, Talking, and Thinking About Art* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016).

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